



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Regular Meeting on March 19, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. The presiding officer was Brandt Heckert. Board members present were Karen Dionne, Mark Lombari, Sara Volino, Darcy DaCosta, Patrick DeSocio, Kate Dickson, Spencer Morris and Christine Lichatz. Ex officio member Caroline Wells was absent. Eileen Collins and Keri Cronin were present at the meeting as guests. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. Review and Approval of Minutes from the Regular Meeting of February 27, 2012

The minutes from the regular meeting held on February 27, 2012 were reviewed by the members via email. The minutes were approved with the following correction: regarding the submission of the letter on business licensing to Town Council, there were six yeas and one vote nay by Ms. DaCosta. With that correction noted, Ms. Volino made a motion to accept the minutes, the motion was seconded by Ms. DaCosta, and all members were in favor.

2. Update from Discover Warren including discussion of Walking Map and improvement and staffing of Railroad Avenue kiosk

Ms. Dickson informed the Board about upcoming events, including the first Bristol Warren Art Night which is scheduled for the evening of Thursday, March 27, 2012. Ms. Collins, from the Warren Preservation Society (WPS), and Ms. Cronin, a member of Discover Warren and WPS, were present at the meeting to discuss the plans for a walking map which would identify historic and retail sites in the downtown area. The map would be a shared venture of Discover Warren and WPS. The Board discussed ideas for the map, how it would be distributed and potential funding for the map. Mr. DeSocio suggested that Brown University might make a contribution because the Brown University was founded in Warren on the site of the Warren Baptist Church. Using an existing walking map of Bristol for comparison, the Board agreed that the map should be as uncluttered as possible and agreed that it will be an important piece for visitors to Warren. The Railroad Avenue kiosk, potentially staffed by senior citizen volunteers, would be one possible distribution point for the map. Ms. Dickson will keep the Board updated on the progress of the map.

3. Report on meeting with Todd Blount concerning the corporate climate in Warren and possible ideas for the tax incentive program (Dickson, DeSocio)

Ms. Dickson and Mr. DeSocio discussed their meeting with Todd Blount. The Board discussed the motivation for Blount's expansion in Fall River as opposed to expanding locally. The most salient point from their interview with Mr. Blount was that Warren lacks a business liaison person in Town Hall to facilitate the process of starting or expanding a business. The Board discussed the need for a business friendly Town Hall and the need for a streamlined and more efficient ordinance process. Both of these would improve the overall business climate in Warren. Ms. Volino made a motion to form a workgroup to revise and rewrite the past memorandum from December 2009 to Town Council regarding a business friendly Town Hall, the motion was seconded by Mr. DeSocio, and all members were in favor. Ms. DaCosta and Mr. DeSocio agreed to serve on the workgroup; they will present a draft of the revised memorandum at the April meeting. Ms. Cronin left the meeting after this agenda item.

4. Discussion of Work Plan objectives pertaining to banner program, gateway signage and Pride in Warren campaign

Ms. Dionne reported that Caroline Wells will work with the Warren DPW to have the remaining "Discover" banners installed with the existing brackets. The Board discussed the need for improved gateway signs to mark the entrance to Warren. The Board agreed that the existing gateway signs, both on the north entry to Warren from Barrington and also on the Warren Swansea line, are undersized and need replacing. The Board discussed the dimensions of the signs and decided that four similar gateway signs are needed. Ms. Volino, Ms. Dionne and Mr. Lombardi agreed to be part of the gateway signage workgroup.

Ms. Dickson noted that the "Pride in Warren" campaign will be included as an agenda item at the next Discover Warren meeting

5. Discussion of Work Plan objective pertaining to storefront and property improvement and beautification in the downtown business area

Continuing with the "Pride in Warren" campaign, Mr. DeSocio described a government program in Ireland called "Tidy Towns", in which towns compete for prize money by completing community improvements. This program encourages communities to improve their local environment and make their communities more attractive places to live and visit. Ms. Dickson and Mr. DeSocio said they were working with Caroline Wells and Davison Bolster to introduce a similar program in Warren. The Board discussed grants, corporate funding and other donation sources to fund the project. The Board also discussed the mission of the contest and how prizes would be awarded. One suggestion was that improvement projects could be judged at the Warren Walk-a-bout in October. The first challenge will be to find a name for the project (the name "Tidy Towns" belongs to the program in Ireland). Ms. Dickson said that this project will be discussed further at the next Discover Warren meeting scheduled for April 16th, 2012. The Board agreed that this was an excellent idea that promotes pride in Warren and has the potential to spread to other communities.

6. Brief update on tax stabilization policy research (Morris)

Mr. Morris briefly updated the Board on his research on tax exemption programs, including the tangible tax program and the tax stabilization policies in Warren. His goal is to rework the tax stabilization ordinances to reflect the current needs of the business community. Mr. Heckert stated he submitted the letter to Town Council requesting that the EDB be given permission to review these policies. The request will be on the Town Council agenda at the meeting scheduled for April 10, 2012.

7. Discussion of options for review and recommendations for revision of municipal policies and ordinances pertaining to key commercial properties in town (Lombardi)

Mr. Lombardi and Mr. Heckert agreed to work together and meet with Town Council members to receive input on their vision for the town as part of going forward with this agenda item. Mr. Morris said that helpful and productive ordinances need to be specifically crafted for large properties such as the Parker Mills and the Tourister property; however, he noted that this will be a challenging task. The Board discussed the challenges of attracting businesses to these key commercial properties.

Ms. Lichatz made motion was made to adjourn, the motion was seconded by Mr. Morris, and all members were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin M. MacDonald

Minutes submitted by Kristin MacDonald
March 17, 2012

